

## **Chilli and the Butter**

*By Grete Wiemann Borregaard, the School for Authors of Children's Literature, Denmark*

Once upon a time there was an old refrigerator. Yes, it was one of the oldest of its kind, but it still did what it was supposed to do.

On the narrow shelf at the top was the butter, all alone. Right under it, the tomato and the spinach were having a pleasant time with the minced meat, and in the shelf in door the whole milk was leaning against the skimmed milk. The bottom of the refrigerator was the most crowded place, as the red cabbage and the white cabbage lay close together in one side, and plastic bags with onions and carrots spread out among the rest of the shelf. Everybody knew their right place, and security reigned in the small fridge.

But one day the idyll was tampered with, when a stranger from the hot countries moved in. This was Chilli, who, tired from a long flight, landed on the top shelf. She was made to stand right next to the butter who was shocked that he had to share his regular place with someone else. The butter was used to being there by himself, indeed, he was almost born to it.

At first he was quite buttoned up, yet after a while he lifted the lid:

"And who are you, if one might ask? We haven't seen someone like you before."

"My name is Chilli," said the newcomer and shook with cold so hard that she accidentally gave him a push.

"Stay on your own side, please," he said and slid back under the lid.

Chilli was shivering from the cold reception, but did everything she could not to offend him. She carefully cleaned herself up after the journey, while she took in her new surroundings.

"Ugh, the air is cold here. Colder than where I come from!"

"You'll have to get used to it if you want to stay," said the butter. "The temperature is as it always is – and as it's supposed to be!" And he closed up again.

From the shelf downstairs the tomato and the spinach were busy studying the stranger.

"Strange shape, isn't it?" whispered the spinach.

"Well, yes, and a little pointy for my taste," answered the tomato.

Chilli heard them, but pretended she didn't.

"Look at the way she displays herself. She is almost naked, wears nothing but a tiny stalk!" The onion gave the carrot a scandalized look.

"And she's far too thin. A terrible sight!" snorted the carrot while looking down at herself.

"Yes, you can't make much soup out of her," added the cabbage who had also followed the discussion.

"Look how she shines!" slopped the skimmed milk to its whole neighbour. "Does she have to draw so much attention to herself?"

Exhausted and sad, Chilli tried to pull her vigour together, but the butter interrupted her.

"That red colour is artificial, I presume?"

"No, I'm completely natural," she laughed insecurely. After all, she was pleased that he showed interest by asking about her, and in order to be really positive about it she said: "You are a little pale! I hope you're not ill?"

The butter started. "Ill! On the contrary! I am thoroughly healthy and, by the way, I have the most natural colour – neither too white nor too yellow."

Chilli was frightened by the rancid remark and pulled away cautiously. But the butter continued:

"I suppose you're quite pretty on the surface, but beneath it you must be sprayed with both poison and hormones?"

She didn't answer. She was getting quite tired of the square lump, but she was new here, so it was probably best to control herself. Instead, she looked at the other figures in the fridge, and several of them looked quite nice, like the whole milk, for instance. But when Chilli tried to catch her eye, she turned away.

"Can you even be used for anything?" The butter wouldn't give up.

Chilli still didn't feel like answering, but this time she did.

"People say that I suit most dishes, both cold and warm," she said quietly. "And that I can bring out the aroma of spices and add colour and taste to dull vegetables."

There was a murmur and a coughing from the cabbage at the bottom.

"I go perfectly with new potatoes," said the butter, as though he hadn't heard her answer. "I wrap them in golden robes so that they become irresistible. Can you do that, I wonder?"

"I haven't tried, but maybe we can create something new together!" she said and thought that maybe he was only tough on the outside.

"Good Lord!" he snorted and continued: "Can you, like *me*, make pancakes go brown and crispy so that they crunch and rustle and melt on the tongue?"

He was laying it on thick now, she thought.

"Maybe you don't even know what pancakes are? You ought to know that here," he said.

The anger made Chilli flush, and she burned with the wish to do something violent. A hard hit on the lid, that's what he needed.

"I suppose a little lady like that doesn't even ...?"

That was it! She wanted to fall on that lump of fat and press her juices on him to tear and sting him.

"Pooh, how pleased you are with yourself!" Chilli suddenly felt strong. "Do you know what I can do? I can make the food burn like a kiss from a loved one and make the whole body brim with heat. I can ..."

"That's enough! That's the limit ..." The butter was so furious that yellow, glistening drops of sweat were dripping off him, down on the tomato. He decided to adjust the thermostat, turning up the cold so that Chilli would become limp and floppy. She would be frozen out! – But he was so eager that he accidentally pushed her, and she flew out over the edge and landed in the spinach.

"Oh, don't put your foot in me," he snapped. "If you must be here, stick to the bottom."

"She's making a pass at you," the tomato whispered at him. "But you're too green to understand that."

Chilli felt herself being pressed downwards through the bars of the shelf, and she landed, deeply hurt, between onions and carrots. The juice was dripping from a long slash in her side and on to the plastic bags.

"She can't leave us alone either," the heads of cabbage nodded at each other. "We can't even have the bottom shelf to ourselves."

At that moment, the door to the fridge was opened, and the butter was taken out along with the rest of the things. Only the milk was allowed to stay in the cold for a while.

The whole lump of butter was thrown down the bottom of a large, black cooking pot.

"Of course I'm the first! I was born to it! Nothing can be cooked without me!" But the butter quickly lost his fair colour, got browner and browner, and when the minced meat was dropped in the pot, he sizzled:

"Give a thought to other people. You don't have to take up all that space."

The tomato was put down together with carrots, onion and cabbage and forced to mix with them, even though she was used to more distinguished company at the middle shelf.

"I hate that heat. It shakes me loose," she went red at the spinach, who fell down and spread his leaves out over her.

Finally, Chilli was rinsed and cut into fine little pieces before she was sprinkled on top of the others.

"Must she always mix with us?" the carrots cried out. They were getting more hard-boiled by the second.

The butter was all over the pot and couldn't help but run into Chilli, who was dizzy and stirred.

"Have you noticed how I cover everything in a glistening coating? Without that, you would not be worth much," he said.

"What do you mean," she said, acidly.

"Well, without me your heat and your taste would not be shown to their best advantage!"

"Haven't you ever heard about Oil? I actually prefer him!" Chilli snapped. "You're boorish and stodgy in comparison."

The butter foamed with rage. How cheeky! – To compare him with that transparent dishwasher.

"Oil! How interesting," mused the red cabbage, who had been listening in.

"Fascinating, fascinating!" simmered the meat.

An eager discussion broke out in the pot. The butter had to do something before he lost control completely. Most of him had already been soaked into onions and cabbage.

"Maybe we can create something new together?" That was the last thing he managed to say to Chilli.

"It's too late now that you're brown and scorched," she answered, while she slowly spread out in the casserole. The meat and the vegetables felt her energy seep into each and every one of their fibres and set off warmth they had never felt before. Maybe she wasn't completely useless after all?